

Matthew 1: 18 - 25; "Jesus, Our Immanuel",
A Christmas Sermon, delivered , by Pastor Paul Rendall
on December 14th, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship.

This morning I brought to your attention the name Immanuel, which I believe is used as a part of the sign which was given to Ahaz, the wicked king of Judah. The name of Immanuel is a sign because it is in the name of Jesus and through His blessed name that the greatest of miracles takes place; God comes to our soul and remains with us. God comes to our soul and gives us Christ. He saves us from our sins through the name of Jesus, and He abides with us through His Holy Spirit forever. I laid before you that this name Immanuel is a sign of the depths and heights; the depths of stubborn unbelief in Ahaz, and many people alive today; but also a sign of the heights of the faithfulness of God. I then proceeded to apply to your hearts and minds the truth that the name Immanuel is also an encouraging sign of our solemn responsibility to believe in the Son who was born a Savior. Israel was called Immanuel's land in Isaiah chapter 8. And even when many enemies tried to conquer it, God's purpose to bring salvation through the line of David in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ was not thwarted. But let us see this afternoon that the name Immanuel is a sign to us in a further way. It is an amazing sign of the great wisdom and power of God, when Christ is formed in the womb of the virgin. It shows us that God is doing something that could not be done by any man to bring it about. It shows us that God was at work to bring forth a person who would be sinless; a person who would combine in Himself all that was necessary to bring fallen man and a Holy God together. This is why we are given the words, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive." This is a most amazing sign. Behold it! Take a good long look at it. Let your gaze be steady upon it. Learn all you can from it. This afternoon I want to take a look at the meaning of this sign from the perspective of Joseph, Mary's husband to be. I want not only to explain his unusual and difficult situation, but I want to apply it to our own conversion and growth in sanctification as well.

1st- Let's look at Joseph's skepticism and his faith in relation to this sign.

Joseph and Mary were betrothed. This means that they were engaged. But in that day, it meant that they were already seen by people in their society, and seeing each other, as a legally married couple, even though the marriage was not yet physically consummated by their becoming one flesh. Joseph was a righteous man. He was a man whose full intention and purpose was to do the right thing, even when his feelings might be deeply involved with Mary; the person he loved as the one who would be his wife. This dear man came to find out that his betrothed was with child. You have to try to put yourself into his place for a moment. He didn't know that God the Holy Spirit was involved in this conception of a child. He thought that it was unfaithfulness on Mary's part. What else could he think or conclude? He knew that He had kept himself pure and free from sexual contact with his beloved. We are not told whether Mary had told him of the angel's visit to her and of his words, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" We are not told whether she related to Joseph that fact that the angel had said that she would conceive a son by the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowing her. We are not informed whether she was able to relate the prophetic words of the angel that this child Jesus would be great and would be called the Son of the Highest, and that the Lord God would give him the throne of his father David, and that he would reign over the house of Jacob forever. We just don't know. But I believe that Mary did tell him. Even so, it must have been a hard thing for Joseph to have even begun to take in. It must have been very hard for him to believe her story. It was such an amazing thing to Joseph that, as he pondered it, it seemed to be too much for him to believe. He was skeptical. How could it be possible that this thing could have come about in any other way than immorality on her part? How could he trust her when she said these things, when he could

not explain them to himself? He might want to believe her, but his righteous mind had great doubts. Our text says that he was "minded to put her away secretly". But God, knowing Joseph's thoughts, sent him an angel to tell him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." Is it not a blessed thing; what God does for Joseph here? He does not leave Mary in this vulnerable and questionable position in regard to her moral integrity in Joseph's sight for long. What God has undertaken and purposed to do in His wisdom and love and power and grace is something that He can and will defend. He can and will explain it where it is necessary and consistent with His purpose for a believer to exercise faith and do the right thing. God's wisdom is very great. But his purpose, that we exercise faith and trust Him in all that He is doing, is very great as well. God would undertake to vindicate Mary's chastity even as He undertook to explain to Joseph what was happening. He would vindicate her chastity and vindicate His righteousness. There was nothing wrong with Mary; there was everything right in her. Let us remember that nothing is too difficult for the Almighty. Whether it is to weave the Lord Jesus in the virgin Mary's womb, or in giving explanation to a righteous man so that he will do the right thing; God can and does all things well. But many things seem impossible for us. Will you not remember this? There is, even in righteous men, a tendency to doubt, a tendency to skepticism when he cannot see what God is doing. God was about to do something new, something that he had not done from the foundation of the world, and something that He would never do again. He was going to join the Essence of the 2nd person of the God-head, His only Begotten Son, who had been with Him from all eternity; with a true and sinless human nature. And he would so unite these two natures that they would exist side by side and yet the person and personality would be one, in the mind and heart and will of the Divine person being formed in Mary's womb. We must always believe, and allow for this in our minds, as those who do believe in God; that God at many points in our lives is doing great things behind the scenes; things that are greater than our greatest conception.

Let us now think of ourselves and apply this, also, to our conversion. In the giving of the gift of salvation, the regeneration of the sinful human heart must take place. Christ must be formed in us, and a new birth must take place for us to see and to enter the kingdom of God. God the Holy Spirit must come and do a work of spiritual conception in our hearts. It is not a work that any man can do. God's holy law cannot do it in us. We are married to the righteous law of God before conversion. We are married to it legally as sinners, bound to do and keep God's commandments. The Law is righteous, but I am carnal, sold under sin. I cannot bear fruit unto God unless I become married to Christ. The law would condemn me as sinner, but God would give me Christ. By faith in Him He would come to live within my heart and change my life forever to think of what God has done for me. Romans 7: 2-4 says, "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives." "But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband." "So then, if while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man." "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another--to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

In the sacrifice and sufferings of Christ, His laying down His life for us, all of the righteous requirements of the Law are fulfilled so that we "die to the Law through the body of Christ". We become "dead to the law" through the body of Christ. Now we can legally be married to Christ. But Christ must be formed in us in the New Birth. And it is the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus that is the basis for this. Christ's death purchases life, but it is His life that gives life. God comes to us first in salvation. His Holy Spirit comes and gives spiritual conception, plants the seed of righteousness in our hearts. We are highly favored ones, and yet we ourselves and others around us are troubled when we begin to tell them of what the Lord by His Holy Spirit has done for us. They may be skeptical and we ourselves may be troubled. But there is no need

to be troubled or afraid. God is at work. His righteousness will be satisfied. His law will be fulfilled. But it will not be fulfilled by human strength, human nature, or human expectations. It will be God's work. Salvation is God's work. "How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given. When God imparts to human hearts, the blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in." (Hymn 152)

This leads us 2ndly to look at what Joseph did when God made it plain to him that Mary's conception was of His Spirit.

It says that the Lord gave Joseph this revelation concerning what He was doing in Mary's womb, while Joseph was asleep. It came to him in a dream. It says that, "he did as the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, but he did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son." Now we know that Joseph was a good man. He was a righteous man, and he well represents the Law in relation to our being converted to Christ. He stood back from the work that was going on in Mary's womb. He was not going to take to himself Mary in any sexual way, because if he did, it might be claimed that he was the father of this Savior of the World. I hope that you understand that it is an essential part of our faith that we have a sinless Savior. And in order for us to have a sinless Savior, there absolutely must be a conception in the womb of Mary that was brought about by God while she was still a virgin. The Savior of the World, the Son of God cannot come into being by the seed of man which would transmit to His nature the fallen likeness of our first forefather Adam. It must be a perfectly holy seed penetrating Mary's ovum by the work and power of the Holy Spirit. And this perfect work of God would not only create a person who would be both God and man, but would show Joseph and all the World that salvation comes not from man, or the law, or man's works. God must save, and God alone. So Joseph took her to wife, but he did not know her, he did not have sexual relations with her, until she had brought forth her first born Son, the Divine Son.

And this shows us the relation of the law to the work of grace in our hearts, in both conversion and sanctification. When we are sinners, the law cannot save us. It can condemn us, and think of putting us away, but it has no ability to save us. We love the law. It is holy and righteous and good. It shows us the righteousness of God and the perfection that he requires of any person before they can be accepted and pleasing to Him. But the law must stand back and wait before it can have a relationship with us that will bear fruit. A man cannot be saved by the works of the Law. God himself by the Holy Spirit must come and do a work in us based upon what Christ has purchased by His death. All that is done for any sinner to be saved, was done by the Lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the World. The virgin birth is an essential part of this. Christ died so that all the work of redemption from first to last would be justified and accomplished. It is justified by His being sinless. He would, as it says in Isaiah 42: 21, "magnify the law and make it honorable." The law and all mankind and especially righteous Joseph must stand by and watch on. True believers look on with love and admiration. The 2nd person of the divine Trinity voluntarily condescends to be joined together with a helpless human nature and to be born as a babe in Bethlehem. And so a sinless Savior is born to live so perfect a life that the Law would rejoice at His perfect love, perfect words, perfect actions in regard to both God and man. And then the justice of God in relation to His holy law would be satisfied fully; not only by obedience, but by sacrifice and punishment in which the holy Jesus would give Himself on our behalf to bear the wrath which we so richly deserve. The Law, if we could personify him here for a minute, saw something in Jesus which went far beyond even what it required. It was, that a Divine Person, whose value exceeds all men's lives, would take the place of the sinner and suffer such anguish that the atonement rendered would satisfy for a world of lost sinners. It is truly mind-boggling. Are you one of those sinners? Then believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saves us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit ,

whom He has poured out abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.(Titus 3: 5-7) This can be you today, you this moment, if you look to Jesus.

But once the Holy Spirit has done his blessed work, and the Lord Jesus is born in you, then the Law can come to us again. For we now love him, and know him to be good, and have a wonderful fruit-bearing relationship with him, not to justify or to sanctify but to keep God's commandments from a thankful heart. He will not condemn us, for the righteousness of Christ covers us. It is true that we were made to die to the law through the body of Jesus Christ, and my parallel breaks down here. But the picture of our relationship to the law and to Christ I hope you will receive. The law is not meant to, and it never can give life. Only the Spirit can do that. But the law is pleased with Christ, Christ being formed in Mary's womb, and Christ being formed in our hearts. For God is glorified in us through the work and the life of Jesus Christ, and the Law is within our hearts because we are in-lawed to Christ. This is why we can now, as a believer bear fruit to God and love Him and keep His commandments. Jesus is our Immanuel, if we will trust in Him with all our heart. He will come to us, and never leave us. His grace will make a new life within our life which will grow up to eternal life. It will begin when we first believe and it will be consummated when we see Him face to face.